

CPI Detailed Report

Data for February 2014

Editors

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Scheduled release dates

Consumer Price Index data are scheduled for initial release on the following dates:

<i>Index month</i>	<i>Release date</i>	<i>Index month</i>	<i>Release date</i>
March	April 15	June	July 22
April	May 15	July	August 19
May	June 17	August	September 17

CONSUMER PRICE MOVEMENTS FEBRUARY 2014

The Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers (CPI-U) increased 0.1 percent in February on a seasonally adjusted basis, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported today. Over the last 12 months, the all items index increased 1.1 percent before seasonal adjustment.

An increase in the food index accounted for more than half of the all items increase in February. The food index rose 0.4 percent in February, driven by a 0.5 percent increase in the index for food at home, with four of the six major grocery store food group indexes increasing. The energy index declined, with a decrease in the gasoline index more than offsetting sharp increases in the fuel oil and natural gas indexes.

The index for all items less food and energy also rose 0.1 percent in February. An increase of 0.2 percent in the shelter index was the major contributor to the rise, but the indexes for medical care, airline fares, personal care, recreation, and new vehicles also increased. In contrast, the indexes for household furnishings and operations, apparel, used cars and trucks, and tobacco all declined in February.

The all items index increased 1.1 percent over the last 12 months; this compares to increases of 1.5 percent in December and 1.6 percent in January. The index for all items less food and energy rose 1.6 percent over the last 12 months. The energy index declined 2.5 percent over the same period, while the food index has increased 1.4 percent.

Table A. Percent changes in CPI for All Urban Consumers (CPI-U): U.S. city average

	Seasonally adjusted changes from preceding month							Un- adjusted 12-mos. ended Feb. 2014
	Aug. 2013	Sep. 2013	Oct. 2013	Nov. 2013	Dec. 2013	Jan. 2014	Feb. 2014	
All items	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.1	1.1
Food1	.0	.1	.1	.0	.1	.4	1.4
Food at home1	.0	.0	.0	.0	.1	.5	.9
Food away from home ¹2	.1	.1	.3	.1	.1	.3	2.2
Energy	-.4	.3	-.9	-.4	1.6	.6	-.5	-2.5
Energy commodities	-.4	-.1	-1.5	-.8	2.6	-.5	-1.3	-6.8
Gasoline (all types)	-.5	-.2	-1.6	-.8	2.6	-1.0	-1.7	-8.1
Fuel oil ¹	1.2	.9	-.6	.4	2.4	3.7	4.1	2.9
Energy services	-.5	.8	.1	.0	.1	2.2	.7	4.8
Electricity	-.1	.5	.2	.5	.4	1.8	-.2	3.8
Utility (piped) gas service	-1.8	1.6	-.5	-1.5	-1.0	3.6	3.6	8.3
All items less food and energy1	.1	.1	.2	.1	.1	.1	1.6
Commodities less food and energy commodities0	-.1	-.1	.0	.0	-.1	-.1	-.4
New vehicles0	.1	-.1	-.1	.0	-.3	.1	.3
Used cars and trucks	-.1	.3	.4	.3	.0	-.5	-.1	.6
Apparel2	-.4	-.4	-.1	.4	-.3	-.3	-.6
Medical care commodities3	.2	.3	.1	-.6	.5	.6	1.7
Services less energy services2	.2	.2	.3	.1	.2	.2	2.2
Shelter2	.2	.1	.3	.2	.3	.2	2.6
Transportation services	-.3	.2	.4	.3	-.4	.1	.3	1.4
Medical care services6	.3	.0	.0	.2	.2	.2	2.4

¹ Not seasonally adjusted.

Consumer Price Index Data for February 2014

Food

The food index rose 0.4 percent in February, its largest increase since September 2011. The food at home index increased 0.5 percent as four of the six major grocery store food group indexes increased. The index for meats, poultry, fish, and eggs rose 1.2 percent while the indexes for dairy and related products and other food at home saw more modest increases of 0.7 percent and 0.2 percent, respectively. The index for fruits and vegetables rose 1.1 percent after five consecutive declines, though fresh vegetables declined 0.2 percent. The index for cereals and bakery products was down 0.4 percent, and the index for nonalcoholic beverages declined 0.3 percent. The food index has risen 1.4 percent over the past year, with the food at home index up 0.9 percent and the index for food away from home up 2.2 percent. The index for meats, poultry, fish, and eggs has risen 4.0 percent over the last 12 months, compared to more modest

increases for dairy and related products, cereals and bakery products, and other food at home. The index for fruits and vegetables and the index for nonalcoholic beverages both declined over the same period.

Energy

The energy index fell 0.5 percent in February as a decline in the gasoline index offset sharp increases in the indexes for fuel oil and natural gas. The indexes for fuel oil and natural gas rose 4.1 percent and 3.6 percent, respectively, while the gasoline index was down 1.7 percent (Before seasonal adjustment, gasoline prices rose 1.1 percent in February). The electricity index declined 0.2 percent after an unusually large increase in January. Over the last 12 months, the energy index has fallen 2.5 percent, due to an 8.1 percent decline in the gasoline index. The three remaining major energy indexes increased, with natural gas posting the highest increase at 8.3 percent.

All items less food and energy

The index for all items less food and energy increased 0.1 percent in February. The shelter index rose 0.2 percent, with the indexes for rent and owners' equivalent rent both rising 0.2 percent, and the index for lodging away from home advancing 0.6 percent. The medical care index increased 0.3 percent in February, the same as January. The index for medical care commodities was up 0.6 percent while the index for medical care services increased 0.2 percent. The index for airline fares rose 1.3 percent in February. The index for personal care was up 0.2 percent. The recreation index was up 0.1 percent. The index for new vehicles rose 0.1 percent. Meanwhile, the index for household furnishings and operations was down 0.4 percent. The apparel index dropped 0.3 percent (the same as January). The index for used cars and trucks fell 0.1 percent. The alcohol and tobacco indexes decreased 0.3 percent and 0.1 percent, respectively.

The index for all items less food and energy has risen 1.6 percent over the last 12 months. The shelter index has risen 2.6 percent over the last 12 months, with the rent index up 2.8 percent and the index for owners' equivalent rent up 2.5 percent. The medical care index has risen 2.3 percent. The index for household furnishings and operations declined 1.6 percent and the index for airline fares has fallen 3.8 percent over the last year.

Not seasonally adjusted CPI measures

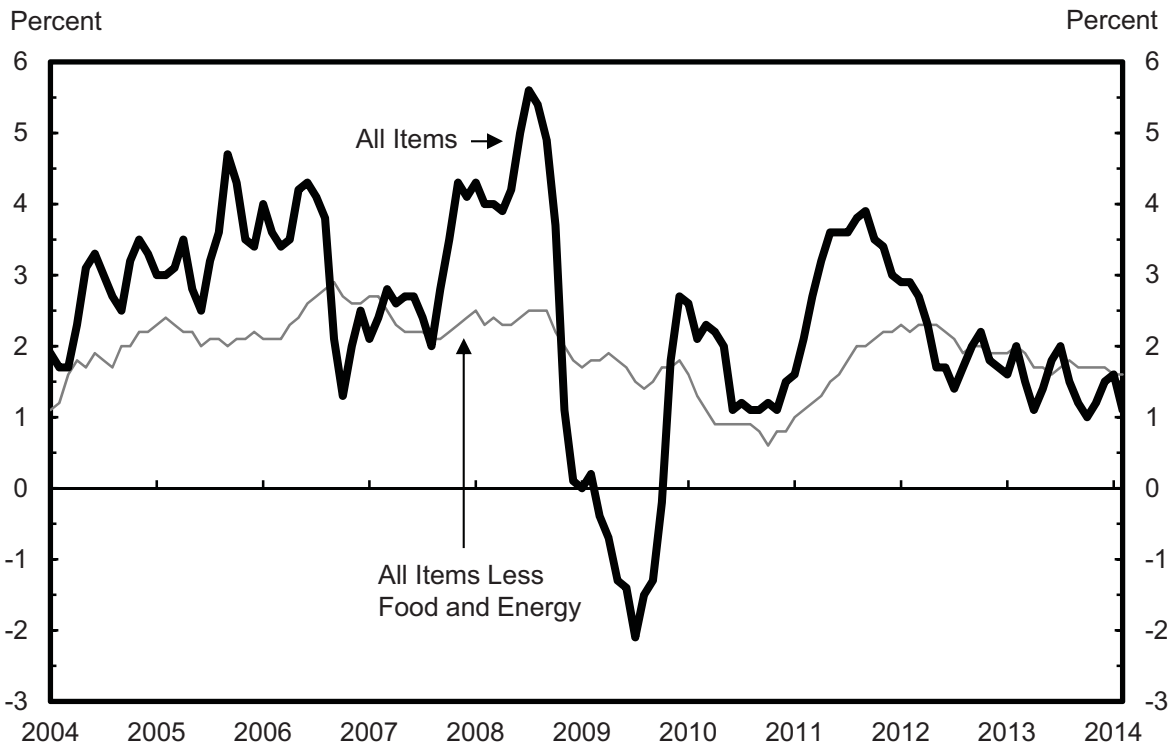
The Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers (CPI-U) increased 1.1 percent over the last 12 months to an index level of 234.781 (1982-84=100). For the month, the index rose 0.4 percent prior to seasonal adjustment.

The Consumer Price Index for Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers (CPI-W) increased 1.0 percent over the last 12 months to an index level of 230.871 (1982-84=100). For the month, the index rose 0.4 percent prior to seasonal adjustment.

The Chained Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers (C-CPI-U) increased 1.0 percent over the last 12 months. For the month, the index rose 0.4 percent on a not seasonally adjusted basis. Please note that the indexes for the post-2012 period are subject to revision.

The Consumer Price Index for March 2014 is scheduled to be released on Tuesday, April 15, 2014, at 8:30 a.m. (EDT).

CPI-U 12-Month Changes, 2004 to Present



Variance Estimates for Price Changes in the Consumer Price Index January–December 2013

Owen J. Shoemaker

This article presents variance estimates for 1-month, 2-month, 6-month, and 12-month percent changes in the Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers (CPI-U). Variance is a measure of the uncertainty caused by the use of a sample of retail prices, instead of the complete universe of retail prices. The estimates cover the period January 2013 through December 2013. Each month the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics collects prices from a sample of approximately 81,600 commodities and services (C&S) quotes in approximately 24,400 outlets¹ around the United States for the Consumer Price Index (CPI).

The most commonly used measure of sampling variability is the *standard error* of the estimate – the square root of the variance. The standard error of the CPI's change can be used to construct confidence intervals to determine whether the change for a particular CPI series is significantly different from zero. This information should help users determine which index changes are significant.

Presentation of findings

The percent changes in the CPI along with their standard errors were estimated for the 12 months from January through December 2013. In summary, tables 1V through 5V show the median values of those percent changes, as well as the median values of the standard errors. Table 1V shows this information for U.S. city average, and tables 2V through 5V show the same information for the Northeast, Midwest, South, and West regions of the country.

For example, from January through December 2013, the 1-month changes in the U.S. city average all items index had a median value of 0.12 percent. The standard errors of those 12 estimates had a median value of 0.03 percent. Margins of error are usually expressed as a statistic's point estimate plus or minus two standard errors, so the margin of error on the CPI's 1-month change is approximately 0.12 percent plus or minus 0.06 percent. Therefore, in a typical 1-month period in 2013, the true change in the CPI was probably somewhere between 0.06 percent and 0.18 percent. The tables also show median percent changes and standard errors for 2- and 6-month intervals and for the full year 2013. Margins of error can be calculated for these intervals in the same way as for a 1-month period.

Analysis of findings

Analyzing the data reveals three significant observations. First, standard errors increase as one moves from the U.S. city average to individual regions of the country and from *all items* to individual item categories. Second, standard errors differ between item categories. Third, the standard errors decrease on a relative basis (standard error divided by price change), as the price change interval gets longer.

The primary reason standard errors increase as one moves from the U.S. city average to individual regions of the country is that sample sizes differ. In general, smaller sample sizes lead to larger standard errors. For example, the U.S. city average all items index is computed each month from approximately 87,700 prices (including Rent and REQ quotes) throughout the United States, and its median standard

¹ In addition, BLS collects approximately 6,100 rents each month, used for both Rent and Rental Equivalence (REQ), each month.

error for 1-month changes is 0.03 percent. By contrast, the Northeast region all items index is computed from approximately 19,000 prices, and its median standard error is 0.07 percent. Regional indexes have larger standard errors because their sample sizes are smaller.

One can observe this same effect moving from the all items index to individual item categories. Again, the U.S. city average all items index is computed each month from approximately 87,700 prices, and its median 1-month standard error is 0.03 percent. By contrast, the U.S. city average recreation index is computed from approximately 5,600 prices, and its median 1-month standard error is 0.14 percent, over four times as large. Again, smaller sample sizes typically lead to larger standard errors.

The second significant observation is that standard errors differ between item categories. There are two reasons for this. First, item categories differ in sample size. For example, the U.S. city average food and beverages index is computed from approximately 34,900 prices each month, while the U.S. city average recreation index is computed from approximately 5,600 prices. Therefore, it is not surprising that the recreation index has larger standard errors. Second, there are real differences in item category price behaviors caused by different selling practices, seasonal influences, and consumer demand. This is especially true for the apparel category, in which it is common for the prices of individual items to fluctuate by 50 percent or more each month. As a result, standard errors for apparel indexes are large.

The third observation is that standard errors generally tend to decrease, on a relative basis (standard error divided by price change), as the price change interval gets longer. For the U.S. city average all items index, the median standard error divided by the median percent change is $0.03/0.12 = 0.25$ for 1-month changes, $0.04/0.16 = 0.25$ for 2-month changes, $0.07/0.59 = 0.12$ for 6-month changes, and $0.08/1.49 = 0.05$ for 12-month changes. This shows that the relative accuracy of percent changes in the CPI generally improves as the price change interval gets longer. On an absolute basis, standard errors tend to increase, but at a decreasing rate.

Findings presented here indicate that users should exercise caution when using CPI estimates to make inferences about index changes for relatively short time periods, for individual goods and services, or for local areas. The standard errors of those estimates may be on the same order of magnitude as the estimates themselves; and, thus, few inferences about them are reliable.

Sources of error

One way of analyzing the error in a survey estimate is to divide the total error into two sources: *sampling error* and *non-sampling error*. Sampling error is the uncertainty in the CPI caused by the fact that a sample of retail prices is used to compute the CPI, instead of using the complete universe of retail prices. Non-sampling error is the rest of the error. Non-sampling error includes things such as incorrect information given by survey respondents, data processing errors, and so forth. Non-sampling error arises regardless of whether data are collected from a sample of retail prices or from the complete universe.

Another way of analyzing error is to divide it into *variance* and *bias*. The variance of the CPI is a measure of how close different estimates of the CPI would be to each other if it were possible to repeat the survey over and over using different samples. Of course, it is not feasible to repeat the survey multiple times, but statistical theory allows the CPI's variance to be estimated anyway. A small variance, for example, indicates that multiple independent samples would produce values that are consistently very close to each other. *Bias* is the difference between the CPI's *expected* value and its *true* value. A statistic may have a small variance but a large bias, or it may have a large variance but a small bias. For an index to be considered accurate, both its variance and bias need to be small.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) is constantly trying to reduce the error in the CPI. Variance and sampling error are reduced by using a sample of retail prices that is as large as possible, given resource constraints. BLS has developed a model that optimizes the allocation of resources by indicating the number of prices that should be observed in each geographic area and each item category, in order to minimize the variance of the U.S. city average all items index. BLS reduces non-sampling error through a series of computerized and professional data reviews, as well as through continuous survey process improvements and theoretical research.

Replication and variance estimation

An important advantage of using sampling is that the CPI's variance can be estimated directly from the sample data. Starting in 1978, the CPI's sample design has accommodated variance estimation by using two or more independent samples of items and outlets in each geographic area. This allows two or more statistically independent estimates of the index to be made. The independent samples are called *replicates*, and the set of all observed prices is called the *full sample*.

BLS collects CPI data in 38 geographic areas across the United States. These areas consist of 31 *self-representing* areas and 7 *non-self-representing* areas. Self-representing areas are large metropolitan areas, such as the Boston, St. Louis, and San Francisco metropolitan areas. Non-self-representing areas are collections of smaller metropolitan areas. For example, one non-self-representing area is a collection of 32 small metropolitan areas in the Northeast region (Buffalo, Hartford, Providence, Bangor, and others), of which 8 were randomly selected to represent the entire set. Within each of the 38 areas, price data are collected for 211 item categories called *item strata*. Together the 211 item strata cover all consumer purchases. Examples of item strata are bananas, women's dresses, and electricity.

Multiplying the number of areas by the number of item strata gives 8,018 ($= 38 \times 211$) different area and item combinations for which price indexes need to be calculated. Separate price indexes are calculated for each one of these 8,018 area and item combinations. After all 8,018 of these *basic-level* indexes are calculated, they are aggregated to form *higher-level* indexes, using expenditure estimates from the Consumer Expenditure Survey as their weights. Examples of higher-level geographic areas are the four regions (Northeast, Midwest, South, and West); and examples of higher-level item categories are the eight major groups (food & beverages, housing, apparel, transportation, medical care, education and communication, recreation, and other goods and services). The highest level of geographic aggregation is the U.S. city average, and the highest level of item aggregation is all items.

Variations are computed with a Stratified Random Groups Method, in which variances are computed separately for certain subsets of areas and items and are then combined to produce the variance of the entire area and item combination. Subsets of items are formed by the intersection of the item category with each of the eight major groups.

Let $CPI(A,I,f,t)$ denote the index value where A = area, I = item category, f indicates that it is the full-sample value, and t = month; and let $CPI(A,I,f,t-k)$ denote the value of the same index in month = $t-k$. In general, the upper-case letter A denotes a *set* of areas, such as the Northeast or Midwest region of the country; and the upper-case letter I denotes a higher-level item category, such as all items or all items less food and energy. Also let $CPI(A,I,r,t)$ and $CPI(A,I,r,t-k)$ be the corresponding index values for replicate = r . Most areas have two replicates, but some have more. Then, the full-sample k-month percent change between months $t-k$ and t is computed by dividing $CPI(A,I,f,t)$ by $CPI(A,I,f,t-k)$, subtracting 1, and multiplying by 100:

$$PC(A,I,f,t,t-k) = \left(\frac{CPI(A,I,f,t)}{CPI(A,I,f,t-k)} - 1 \right) \times 100$$

Every index has a weight $W(A,I,f)$ or $W(A,I,r)$ associated with it, which is used to combine the index with other indexes to produce indexes for larger geographic areas and larger item categories. For example, the weights are used to combine all 8,018 basic-level indexes into higher-level indexes such as the U.S. city average all items index. The product of an index and its weight is called a *cost weight*, $CW(A,I,r,t) = CPI(A,I,r,t) \times W(A,I,r)$, and is an estimate of the total cost in area = A for consumption of item category = I in month = t .

For the Stratified Random Groups method used here, replicate percent changes are defined as follows: full sample cost weights are used for every geographic area within area = A except for one of the areas. In the omitted area, the full sample cost weight is replaced by a replicate cost weight. Let the lower case letter a denote one of the 38 basic-level areas included in area = A , and let the lower case letter i denote the intersection of item category = I with one of the 8 major groups. Then, the replicate percent change, for area = a , item subset = i , replicate = r , between months $t-k$ and t , is computed as:

$$PC_S(a,i,r,t,t-k) = \left(\frac{CW(A,I,f,t) - CW(a,i,f,t) + CW(a,i,r,t)}{CW(A,I,f,t-k) - CW(a,i,f,t-k) + CW(a,i,r,t-k)} - 1 \right) \times 100$$

for self-representing areas. For non-self-representing areas, the replicate percent change, for area = a , item category = I , replicate = r , between months $t-k$ and t , is computed as:

$$PC_N(a,I,r,t,t-k) = \left(\frac{CW(A,I,f,t) - CW(a,I,f,t) + CW(a,I,r,t)}{CW(A,I,f,t-k) - CW(a,I,f,t-k) + CW(a,I,r,t-k)} - 1 \right) \times 100$$

where:

$$CW(A,I,f,t) = \sum_{a \subset A} \sum_{i \subset I} CW(a,i,f,t)$$

$$CW(A,I,f,t) = \sum_{a \subset A} CW(a,I,f,t)$$

$$CW(a,I,f,t) = \sum_{i \subset I} CW(a,i,f,t)$$

and likewise for replicates. The symbol " $a \subset A$ " means that the sum is over all basic-level areas within area = A , and the symbol $i \subset I$ means that the sum is over all item categories that are intersections of item category = I with a major group.

Then, the variance is computed with the following Stratified Random Groups Variance Estimation Formula:

$$V[PC(A,I,f,t,t-k)] = \sum_{i \subset I} \sum_{a \subset A \cap S} \frac{1}{R_a(R_a-1)} \sum_{r=1}^{R_a} (PC_S(a,i,r,t,t-k) - PC(A,I,t,t-k))^2 + \sum_{a \subset A \cap N} \frac{1}{R_a(R_a-1)} \sum_{r=1}^{R_a} (PC_N(a,I,r,t,t-k) - PC(A,I,t,t-k))^2$$

where S and N are the sets of all self-representing and non-self-representing areas in the CPI's geographic sample, respectively; and $A \cap S$ and $A \cap N$ are the sets of all self-representing and non-self-representing areas within area = A . The number R_a is the number of replicates in area = a .

Finally, the standard error of the percent change is computed by taking the square root of its variance:

$$SE[PC(A, I, f, t, t-k)] = \sqrt{V[PC(A, I, f, t, t-k)]} .$$

For more information, write to the CPI Information Office, BLS - Room 3130, 2 Massachusetts Avenue, N.E., Washington, DC 20212, or call Owen Shoemaker at 202-691-6918.

Table 1V. U.S. city average, median price change and median price change standard error for the Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers (CPI-U), by detailed expenditure categories for 1-, 2-, 6-, and 12-month intervals, 2013-Continued

Item and group	U.S. city average							
	1 Month		2 Month		6 Month		12 Month	
	Median price change	Median standard error	Median price change	Median standard error	Median price change	Median standard error	Median price change	Median standard error
Special aggregate indexes								
All items less medical care	0.10	0.04	0.14	0.05	0.54	0.07	1.40	0.08
Commodities less food	-.03	.09	-.38	.12	-.78	.16	-.65	.18
Nondurables less food	-.06	.13	-.47	.17	-.89	.23	-.56	.25
Nondurables less food and apparel03	.09	-.84	.12	-1.11	.15	-1.04	.16
Nondurables	-.04	.08	-.16	.10	-.19	.14	.35	.15
Apparel less footwear	-.22	.56	-.11	.78	.52	1.15	.43	1.35
Services less rent of shelter14	.06	.37	.08	1.25	.12	2.53	.14
Services less medical care services16	.04	.38	.06	1.16	.09	2.36	.11
Energy14	.14	-.95	.18	-1.55	.24	-.99	.19
All items less energy13	.04	.24	.05	.82	.07	1.67	.08
All items less food and energy13	.04	.23	.05	.84	.08	1.72	.09
All items less food and shelter09	.05	.00	.07	.23	.10	1.02	.11
All items less food, shelter, and energy11	.05	.11	.08	.63	.11	1.27	.13
All items less food, shelter, energy, and used cars and trucks09	.06	.14	.08	.60	.12	1.39	.14
Commodities less food and energy commodities09	.10	-.09	.15	-.03	.20	-.07	.24
Commodities less food, energy, and used cars and trucks09	.11	-.13	.16	-.17	.22	.00	.27
Energy commodities	-.04	.15	-1.79	.20	-2.51	.20	-2.64	.18
Services less energy services19	.04	.38	.06	1.16	.08	2.36	.10
Domestically produced farm food05	.13	.01	.15	.30	.17	1.18	.18
Utilities and public transportation15	.11	.53	.16	1.21	.22	2.21	.24

Table 9. Consumer Price Index for Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers (CPI-W): Seasonally adjusted U.S. city average, detailed expenditure categories -Continued

(1982-84=100, unless otherwise noted)

Item and group	Seasonally adjusted indexes				Seasonally adjusted annual rate percent change for					
					3 months ended—				6 months ended—	
	Nov. 2013	Dec. 2013	Jan. 2014	Feb. 2014	May 2013	Aug. 2013	Nov. 2013	Feb. 2014	Aug. 2013	Feb. 2014
Special aggregate indexes										
Apparel less footwear	119.563	120.238	120.274	118.934	-2.8	7.3	-5.5	-2.1	2.2	-3.8
Services less rent of shelter ⁴	269.837	270.072	271.415	272.160	2.1	1.2	2.3	3.5	1.7	2.9
Services less medical care services	262.250	262.705	263.607	264.209	2.4	1.8	2.5	3.0	2.1	2.8
Energy	244.398	248.371	249.503	248.090	-18.2	7.2	-4.8	6.2	-6.4	.6
All items less energy	229.580	229.817	230.080	230.377	1.3	1.9	1.5	1.4	1.6	1.5
All items less food and energy	228.432	228.691	228.973	229.147	1.4	1.9	1.6	1.3	1.7	1.4
Commodities less food and energy commodities	150.113	150.053	149.896	149.630	.2	.5	-.7	-1.3	.4	-1.0
Energy commodities	302.310	309.916	308.144	303.987	-30.8	15.4	-9.1	2.2	-10.6	-3.6
Services less energy services	283.840	284.323	284.903	285.404	1.8	2.4	2.5	2.2	2.1	2.3
Domestically produced farm food	240.994	241.104	241.222	242.661	-.3	1.8	.2	2.8	.7	1.5
Utilities and public transportation	208.613	208.462	210.283	210.902	4.4	-2.1	2.9	4.5	1.1	3.7

¹ Not seasonally adjusted.
² Indexes on a December 1997=100 base.
³ This index series was calculated using a Laspeyres estimator. All other item stratum index series were calculated using a geometric means estimator.
⁴ Indexes on a December 1984=100 base
⁵ Indexes on a December 1986=100 base.
⁶ Indexes on a December 1983=100 base.
⁷ Indexes on a December 1990=100 base.
⁸ Indexes on a December 2001=100 base.
⁹ Special index based on a substantially smaller sample.

¹⁰ Indexes on a December 1993=100 base.
¹¹ Indexes on a December 2009=100 base.
¹² Indexes on a December 1996=100 base.
¹³ Indexes on a December 2005=100 base.
¹⁴ Indexes on a December 1988=100 base.
¹⁵ Indexes on a December 2007=100 base.
 NA Data not adequate for publication.
 - Data not available.
 NOTE: Index applies to a month as a whole, not to any specific date.

